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Writing Time – Using Space. The Notebook of a Worker at Krupp's Steel Mill and Manufacturing – an Example from the 1920s

Alf Lüdtke*

Abstract: »Zeit aufschreiben – Raum nutzen. Das Aufschreibebuch eines Industriearbeiters bei Krupp – ein Beispiel aus den 1920er Jahren«. This piece shall explore the use-value of ego-documents which are not in the focus of the recent surge of interest in these materials. At the center is an unpublished 'Aufschreibebuch' (not a diary but a notebook) of a Krupp-worker covering the 1920s into the late 1940s (with some addenda even into the 1970s). How did the writer try to 'keep time' in his recordings of his spending and using time? One of the striking features is the spatial 'simultaneity of registers' which the author pursued: politics, family and weather/gardening stand out, occasionally seasoned by local, national or global catastrophes. More generally, this spatial frame paralleled multiple activities and occurrences. Still, the writer followed their temporal sequence. In other words: the spatial recordings show the flip-side of the 'timespace' (Jon May) the writer encountered and appropriated. Thus, temporality appears as the space of and for writing – made visible and at the same time consumed by inscribing pages of paper. From this angle I want to re-set the question of 'acceleration' which has become a principal label of the modern era, esp. the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here my take is that 'acceleration' is missing crucial practices (and experiences) of the historical actors. Rather, scrutiny of people's usage of space when writing time reveals various forms of intensification.

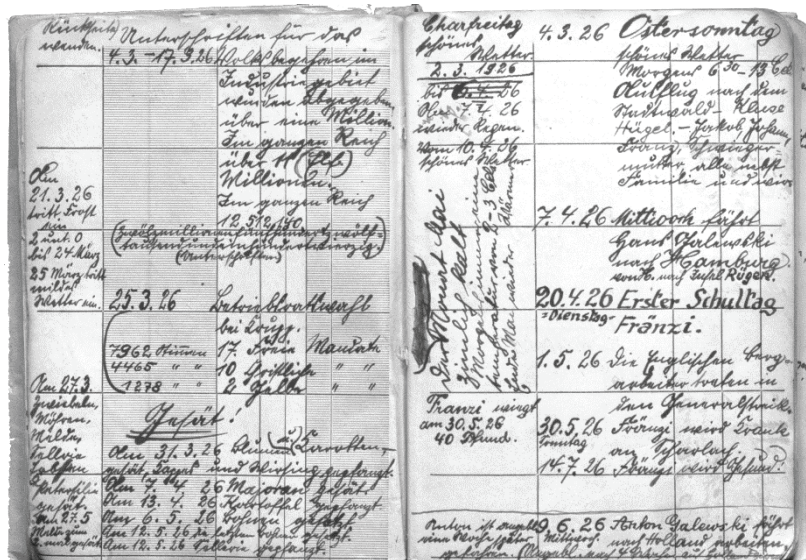
Keywords: Ego-document, industrial worker, Weimar Republic, temporality, timespace.

1. A Notebook – Close Inspection

Looking at this handwritten piece of paper, what do we recognize? I assume most observers will discern numbers, letters and words, even if they may be illegible to them. In turn, researchers are used to turn to the content: what does the text say or mean?

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Image 1: Page of a Notebook, 1926. Notebook Paul Maik, March-June 1926



Source: Haus der Essener Geschichte / Stadtarchiv (HdEG), Bestand 643. Permission kindly granted by HdEG.

Certainly, this is part of the task. However, as a first step I propose to approach the question more literally. What is it what observers apprehend? One answer might be: scribbled notes, a handwritten text or handwritten notations. Still, even prior to such categorization we may observe a reproduction of a surface inscribed by someone. Clearly visible are vertical and horizontal lines, obviously printed upon paper. Another look reveals a fault in the middle, dividing yet also connecting two sheets of paper: this can be taken for a book, a book for regular (or, for that matter, occasional) notations, not the least of someone's income and/or expenses.

One can recognize six horizontal divides – perhaps each segment suitable for one of the six workdays of each week? At any rate, corroborating evidence shows that tracing on time and its passing was a primary mover for individual writing.

Two entries on the right page are emphasized by bold letters, both are written in Latin characters. The first one sits on top of the page: "Ostersonntag (Easter Sunday)"; and just below the middle of this very page another entry also stands out: "20.4.26, Erster Schultag Fränzi" (first school day, Fränzi – the author's small son).

On the left page notation starts a few weeks earlier; on the upper left one can read "4.3.-17.3.26 signatures for the referendum (*Volksbegehren*)". The notation does not tell the goal of this referendum. Obviously the writer knew what

he wanted to say and assumed that possible readers would know as well (if there ought to be any possible reader!).

Of course, historians have to provide context. Here it is a referendum (“Volksbegehren”) as first step of a plebiscite (“Volksentscheid”) inaugurated by political organizations of the left in order to dispossess the ruling families of the former German Monarchies (which had been toppled by the Revolution of 1918; the supporters of the plebiscite claimed that these families’ private properties were, in fact, public). And as historians usually know: although more than eleven million voters nationwide supported the move it failed in the end (Schüren 1978).

Parallel, on the left side of either of the two pages the writer noted temperatures and other weather data for single days: “21.3.26 freezing temperatures, -2° C, 25.3 mild weather”. In the same column the writer took note that he had “seeded onions, peas, parsley and carrots” on “22.3.” or March 22.

To the right, on the major part of this page, the writer recorded also for mid-March: “Elections for the company council at Krupp [steel mill, at the city of Essen]”. He expanded this bit of information by adding respective votes of the contesting labor unions and the resulting seats in the council. Yet, directly beneath this notation the writer put an underlined “Gesät! (seeded!)”, followed by the items: carrots, potatoes, beans.

2. The Writer

These double-pages are a sample taken from the 370 pages (*octavo*) of a notebook. On the first page the writer put his name, Paul Maik, and his date of birth: 1891, in an East Prussian village. Without further ado he opened his entries on page two by chronologically listing a few selected events and individuals since the eighteenth century, among them the names and dates of three authors of the nineteenth century (who are not easily situated next to each other, but were revered among educated folks devoted to oppositional leanings): Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Anatole France. On the subsequent three pages Maik presented an overview of personal and family dates (weddings of his siblings, child-births of their offspring). This written list, brief as it may appear, documents a certain autobiographical awareness and drive.¹ On the following page begins – in February 1920 – what became the writer’s regular notations of ‘current affairs’.

Among the items Maik recorded here is his and his older brother’s migration to ‘the West’ in March 1908. Already after a few days he got a job at his new

¹ For the developing field of studies on ‘ego-documents’ (Rudolf Dekker) see the recent comprehensive assessment by Claudia Ulbrich, Hans Medick and Angelika Schaser (2012).

location: at Krupp's *Gusstahlfabrik*, the renowned steel mill and center of machine construction and armament. However, which workshop he was assigned to, and what his job was (and if he was hired as industrial apprentice or not): this remains a total blank here. Only decades later the confirmation of Maik's retirement from Krupp's in 1957 mentioned his job, however only for the last few years: then he had been a transport hand.

Back to the first pages of the notebook: The 1908-entry is followed by seven events of 1911. One of them is on Maik's commission of a photographer to take his picture. This was the first time his picture was taken (as he added). Among the final items of this list are the three war wounds he suffered during World War I. Four months after the war he was rehired by Krupp in March 1919. At that time the company employed more than 100.000 people and was renowned for its railway steel tyres and, even more, artillery guns of any caliber (Tenfelde 1994; Bajohr 1988). In spring of 1919 Maik had already begun to take note of commodity prices. In the following months he turned them, step by step, into the notations we know of – a habit he adamantly pursued for about thirty years, until fall of 1947. Beyond, he dealt in intermittent notes with occurrences of the 1950s and early 1960s and randomly even of early and mid-1970s. The last couple of pages of his notebook are left empty.

This notebook is archived by the city archive of Essen². Maik's daughter in law handed the piece and some additional materials, among them two photo albums, to the archive in 1987. It is the archival inventory that provides the date of Maik's death: 1978.

3. The Text: Parallel Columns

In contrast to customary diary-writing, Maik neither provides reporting narratives nor extended plots of individual episodes. Rather, he labels occurrences (strikes, public speeches, international conferences) or activities (gardening, outings) by writing the respective label and adding the date they happened. If needed or possible, he adds results (for instance, the number of votes of elections) or names of participants (of an outing).

However, the most intriguing feature is the *parallel notation*: Separate *columns* display at one glance the *simultaneity of several fields of attention and*

² Haus der Essener Geschichte / Stadtarchiv (HdEG), Bestand 643. In the late 1990s a fellow historian, the late Dr. Erich Schmidt (Essen), generously alerted me to this notebook. My first approach to some of its features was a contribution to the panel 'Zeitpolitik und Zeitgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert' at the 49th Historikertag, Mainz, Sept. 28, 2012, coordinated by Alexander Geppert and Till Kössler. I am preparing a more expanded treatment of the issues this material raises for a thematic volume on time and its historiography planned for the journal *"Geschichte und Gesellschaft"*, edited by A. Geppert and T. Kössler.

action. On the left side of most pages the writer tracks weather and gardening in one – rather smallish – column. In a parallel column he renders a catch-all spectrum of different items, recorded for the same span of time that is devoted to weather and planting foodstuffs. This second column covers personal or political as well as local, national or global occurrences and activities. Here the writer is recording elections on company as on local or national levels; he gives note of mass demonstrations or strikes in the local (Essen) as in the national or international context. He is listing disasters and their victims on global or local scale (whether the collapse of a bridge or a mining explosion). Yet, such publicized items occasionally go along with a note on dentistry work on his behalf, or, as in April 1926, a highlighted reference to the first school day of his 6-year old son.

Principally Maik kept to the columns. Still, he did not take their limits as immutable. Rather, from time to time he overstepped lines and expanded the respective space. For instance, when in spring notes on planting and sowing demanded to mention all the plants and herbs he wanted to grow (cf. the double page of May-June 1926) he drew that column wider. In other words: escalating “timespace” (May 2001) demanded in his eyes more writing space. The writer also sparsely but regularly highlighted a date or term (or both) by enlarging some letters or words (see 1926: three times – first school day; Easter; “seed-ed!”). Another – most sparsely used – means was the switch from common “current” script to Latin script, as he did in 1926 with Easter and the first school day of his son. These punctuations may indicate the effort to emphasize a specific item. More importantly, however, such punctuations stuck to the respective page in Maik’s book, thus preserving a specific charge attached to the marked event and date.

4. Flow of Notations – Fragmentary Entries

Most of the pages of Maik’s notebook are covered by handwritten notations. Occasionally, however, the writer has supplanted his hand by pasting newspaper clippings. For instance, by this token he does document the drama of skyrocketing prices of individual consumer goods during the hyperinflation in 1922/23 or the great depression between 1929 and 1933/34. Such collages help Maik to minutely take note of ever new turns of the “screw of prices (Preisschaube)” of daily necessities. Within the flexible limits of the second column Maik renders his blend of national and individual household economy. These notations *cum* pastings testify to the ‘individual face’ of economic cycles like the Great Depression after 1929.

Yet the writer also employed clippings to cover another (extended) moment in detail: the German military successes in the first years of World War II. Of course, the printed texts of the newspapers comprised much more detailed

information on the same space than he would have mastered by writing in longhand.

In a different way the writer takes note of the layoffs he endured during the economic slump. In particular, entries from 1929 to late 1934 graphically display the temporary yet overruling presence of these thoroughly unwanted layoffs for one shift, the unpaid “*Feierschichten*”. Maik just put down this single term – and nothing else for that day. Repeatedly most of one page turns into a monotonous list just covered by the same “*Feierschicht!*” for weeks.

Moreover, he did bolster the entry by regularly underlining the very term “*Feierschicht!*” in red and using an exclamation mark, a rare punctuation in Maik’s writings.

In the wider column the reader also finds annual or seasonal highlights and holidays: for instance, date and reference for Easter in April 1926. The writer also takes note of outings where “we” participate (alluding to the nucleus family of the Maiks) as do one or two relatives or acquaintances. Interestingly, Maik’s spouse (the textile worker Johanna) is mentioned only four times, for their marriage in spring 1920, a small surgery in 1935, she bobbed her hair in 1940, and finally in the summer of 1945, after the end of WWII, where she is mentioned as being on two-or-three-day “foraging”-trips for food.

The steady flow of each notation indicates that Maik wrote the entries in one piece. The coherent appearance of these notations may also reflect a comprehensive writing – not day by day but in larger intervals (weekly or monthly?).

5. Laconic Register

The laconic mode of the notations underlines the impression that the writings were primarily meant as a tool to recall his own activities and other moments he considered important and/or memorable. That he almost never turned to the ‘how’ of events or activities corroborates this point: since he knew how to sow beans or herbs it was not necessary to go into the specific ways of doing it; notations of such practices would only waste writing time and writing space.

The *laconic brevity* almost totally avoids characterizations which might resonate with specific feelings or, more generally, emotions the writer may have connected to layoffs, or to a speech by Hitler, or to an outing and the visit of a tourist site.

The space he used for the notation and, secondly, the style of notating are the only indicators for emotional charges when doing these notations. There is no clue to what extent such writing recalled emotions the author remembered from the very situation he was mentioning in his notation. Certainly, the additional exclamation mark and red underlining signaled an emphasis – as in his notation of “layoff” (“*Feierschicht!*”). In these cases, his emotions may have ranged from anger and rage to despair – similar to what was amply recorded in

journalistic and literary accounts of the time, especially during the Great Depression after 1929.³

Still, it is much more difficult to trace the emotions at stake when the writer put down a laconic note on a mining explosion at a nearby site (in May 1922) that killed 23 people as he mentioned in his entry. Similarly opaque are his brief entries of family outings. They give date and topographic goal and add the names of the few (mostly four or five) participants from family and friends. In turn, these notes offer ample space for speculation: Had one of these affairs been a pleasant pastime, as stereotypes of leisure time often foregrounded? Or was it a rather tedious or, at least, mixed affair, spelling family as ensemble of tensions if not open contestation?

Again, the writer's stance beyond these notations remains veiled. Or does the permanency of the column on weather and gardening indicate a stable hierarchy of importance? Would one, then, read this very column as an analogy of a spine that holds together both imaginary and material registers of this worker's everyday – when Maik registered sunshine, rain and temperature and, in turn, tended to beans, cabbage, or potatoes? No question: readers can choose. Nevertheless, they cannot overcome the lack of any explicit reference to the writer's emotional state (or practice). While the history of political concepts and scholarly terms ("*Begriffsgeschichte*") is operative for some time, no parallel effort aims at tracing the liminal zones of vernacular parlance or notation. This leaves alone also the vast terrain of people's unsaid and of their (sometimes deafening) silences.

In principle, corroborating layers of notations and materials should help to further contextualize the bits and pieces that are available in the very notebook. However, the few remaining letters from family written in the 1930s do not provide much beyond Maik's entries into his notebook. Also the family's two photo albums of the same years do not provide additional clues.

Different is another genre of material that I already employed elsewhere: reports of outside observers who either 'participated' or remained distant to those whom they studied. For instance, the report of the young protestant pastor Goehre who had spent three months as 'participant observer' *incognito* among roughly 120 metal workers, in 1890 at a plant in Saxony (a state in the center of Germany; Goehre 1891, 74). The pastor wanted to explore social 'others' to assess potential for 'domestic mission' (*Innere Mission*) – or, for colonizing this segment of the proletarian 'life-world'. It is the detailed and partly passionate account of a passionate and curious outsider that provides detailed

³ Cf. for a wide spectrum of physical reactions and voiced responses of people who actually had lost their jobs in this depression-context the sociography of the Austrian industrial village Marienthal in 1931 and 1932, mainly carried out by Marie Jahoda and Paul Lazarsfeld (Jahoda/Lazarsfeld/Zeisel 1933/1960/1975, in particular 83-92 on the changing perceptions and usages of 'time' among villagers).

features of the “day-to-day living together, working together, sweating together of about 120 workers” (ibid., 74).⁴ Closer to the 1920s is another layer of traces: the contributions to an essay competition organized in the late 1920s by the Women’s Bureau of the German Textile Workers’ Union. These were reports by working women to alert a wider audience to territory mostly unknown to them: the factory shopfloor as encountered by these female workers (Lüdtke 1991).

6. Synchronicity and Temporality – Moments of Heightened Intensity?

The notations represent in their parallel columns the writer’s effort to keep (or bring) various fields of forces (and fields of action) into synchronicity. He put his gardening next to a local strike or national elections and the ever more burdensome screw of (consumer-)prices, interspersed by a note on his toothache. For Maik this synchronicity of different temporalities, that is, of multiple ways of perceiving and of ‘making’ time, refers to

- 1) the annual seasons in their cyclical sequence, in particular when it comes to gardening or to outings;
- 2) irregular conjunctures like election periods;
- 3) the dynamics of macro-economic ups and downs – in their local appearance as to 6-8-year-Juglar cycles, occasionally paralleled if not heavily emphasized by the longer (60-80 years) waves of economic growth or depression as outlined by N.D. Kondratieff (Rosenberg 1967, 1-37).

However, the usage Maik made of his writing space not only recorded the passing of time, reflected as temporality in the writer’s eye. Rather, on the pages of his notebook changing temporalities met with shifting intensities of his encounters and activities. For instance, when Maik used much space for a few days he obviously felt driven by the heightened intensity of occurrences:

⁴ The complete quote of Goehre in English (Translation Alf Lüdtke): “More than anything else these people teased one another, scuffled and tussled – indulged in horseplay, where and whenever it seemed possible. People looked for friends, and acquaintances; clay was thrown at someone who passed by, the slip-knot of his apron was untied from behind, the plank of a seat was pulled away while a fellow-worker took a break, someone’s way was blocked unexpectedly or they ‘pulled someone’s leg.’ – But, to be sure, especially favored among older workers at the end of the week was another form of horseplay: ‘beard-polish’. Shaving was a once-a-week affair, a common practice among workers, and was performed usually Saturday night or Sunday morning. By the end of the week, the worker whose beard had grown in would grab the head of a chap with more tender cheeks, lips, and chin, and would rub his face against the youth’s face, a process which of course had a quite painful result. Before the victim realized just what had happened to him, the wrong-doer had already disappeared.”

He took a double page to record seven days between October 20 and 26, 1922 – the hyperinflation was in full swing (see above). The notations listed the rapid surge of new prices of foodstuffs and consumer goods, from shoes to milk to coal for cooking and heating. In contrast, in spring of 1926 the writing space of one double-page entailed three and a half months, from early March to late June: then, the intensity of uncertainties as triggered by the hyperinflation had evaporated.

Another case in point of using much writing space to cover a surge of events in a short period of time) are the notations Maik made for May and June 1940, on the German military victories “in the west”, the so-called “*Blitzkrieg*” and the ensuing defeat of the French army. Similarly in April and May 1945: two double pages for the four weeks between mid-April and mid-May. The following double-page covers five subsequent months, from mid-May until mid-October of 1945.

A special intensity of coping with pressing demands and, even more, existential uncertainties seems to surface here. Yet extended notations on a comparatively short period of time do not necessarily reflect acceleration of time. This is, however, a wide-spread assumption identifying modernity at large with the impression of a swifter or “accelerated” passing of time (cf. Rosa 2005). Yet Maik’s notations do not show traces of haste or hurry. Rather, his style and mode of writing seems unfettered through all the years: page after page filled by a steady hand and well-crafted regular letters and words. This is another piece of evidence testifying to the intensity which, at least, this writer put into his notations.

At the same time, however, these writings also testify to crucial shortcomings of the claim of a long-term “acceleration” of society at large. The current argument of “acceleration” ignores the very space which time needs or takes. In particular, the emphasis on acceleration underrates the interrelationships of and within “timespace”. In the case of Maik’s notebook: More items he felt obliged (or animated) to record demanded more writing space. However, this writing space was limited. Would he now waste precious paper when before a few brief notations had sufficed to cover several weeks if not months? Yet from spring 1922 prices seemed to skyrocket within days – still, the specific prices mattered immensely for individual house holding if not survival (Ken 1975; Winkler 1985a, 1985b, 46-90; Feldman 1993; with a focus on the city of Munich: Geyer 1998, 130-66, 167-204).

Thus, the more items the daily “screw of prices” affected and squeezed the more intensely Maik seems to have felt the urge to pin them down in detail. In turn, he needed additional writing space (including space for pasting clippings), and he needed this space faster than before. Yet if space remained limited (as it was) – a jam was inevitable (cf. Rosa 2005, 451-9, 460-6: on ossification and slowing-down as result of acceleration; these points, however, do not inhibit Rosa in his advocacy of ongoing acceleration). In the case of Maik’s notebook:

more items that occurred in a limited period of time provoked jams which, in turn, slowed down the recording. Maik not only had to write more (and perhaps more often) but had also to cope with the confines of limited space. Still, the writer was not dealing with an unilinear process: In November 1923 the national government brought the hyperinflation to a halt, which triggered the return to fiscal and economic normality. In turn, Maik resumed his previous habit of summarily notating events, including the more limited usage of writing space.

Maik's notations visualize the perception of intensified or, to the contrary, flat (or even flattened) time. In this vein, the writer renders recent times as they have passed. He states by and in his notations that he is 'done' with them.

7. Voids

The notations written or pasted into Maik's book list specific events or people's activities. At the same time they do so by making (or leaving) *voids*. Such intermittent spaces – as on each page – may stand for experiences or encounters the writer does not consider as important for or desirable among his notations. Still, except for the writer himself these voids remain silent. Multiple resonances and echoes (Joan W. Scott 2001) are not excluded but happen solely in the reader's domain.

Similarly, this material leaves open if and how the writer 'has' or does not 'have' (or claims or abhors, ignores or pursues) space and time of his own. For instance, did the writer try or pursue to practice stubborn self-reliance (or "*Eigensinn*"; cf. Lüdtke 1993a)? Did he or others swing back and forth between, for instance, acceptance (of lay-offs) and distance (to or denial of yet another lay off)? Do these glimpses into synchronous practices and fields of action (gardening at home; striking at work) reveal forms of individual *meandering* between such poles?

Parallel to the interplay of filled spaces and blank spots, the notebook contains a second void: a *lacuna* as to the topics mentioned so far. Completely absent are actual *practices* (and concrete experiences) of *industrial work*. And the few items Maik takes up, from elections for the workers' council to strike actions, grasp but a small number of extraordinary events. The shopfloor in its many folds still remains in the dark.

Thus, for scrutinizing work practices one cannot mine Maik's notations. Moreover, even his own task and activities on the job go unnoticed here. Only one small exception appears on one of the first pages: for February 22, 1920 Maik noted that he was moved from the 'quickhammers' to the foundry; his task was to crack open the moulds of finished casts. The writer's general silence about the shopfloor includes strikes at Krupps's. He mentioned them but never indicated how he himself had acted in that situation, whether he himself had participated. There is one exception, however: his notations of those

layoffs he had to bear. In these cases he did not change his style of notation. He added, however, a demonstrative punctuation that signals a strong emotional charge (cf. above “*Feierschicht*”).

Therefore, for reconstructing settings and situations of work one has to rely on other layers of remnants and traces: for instance, the material and imaginary spaces of printed manuals by industrial practitioners for practitioners. Furthermore, the paper layers of thousands of archived documents are indispensable, whether the issue is recruitment or work-flow and accidents, whether complaints from above and below are at stake or penalties for violating orders or company rules (cf. Lüdtkke 1982, 1986). Also pictures, from drawings to etchings to paintings to photographic prints: all of them provide further layers of two-dimensional spaces suitable for storing moments of the past – or ‘frozen time’ (see, for example, the photographic self-portrait of Theo Gaudig, at Krupp’s; Lüdtkke 1993b).

Accidentally – so it seems – Maik mentions only once, almost at the end of his notebook, that his site of work was Krupp’s railway engine plant (note form 1949). Still, obviously his main task was to operate as a repair mechanic. In other words, his tasks were mostly non-repetitive and demanded creativity and dexterity (cf. Popitz 1957). Rather, he had to master unexpected ruptures at the point of production. He was one of those workers whom superiors, union activists, and colleagues in unison during the 1920 acclaimed as “German quality workers” (Lüdtkke 1986).

Parallel to the absence of industrial work processes another void looms even larger: the multiple faces and facets of *violence*. For the writer violence had come as work in utmost concrete form: he had survived four years of soldiering in WWI, when he had to blend killing and working (and vice versa). More generally, the dynamics of mechanized warfare meant an intricate interlacing of both: goal-oriented toil with pleasures of power no less for rank and file (to brutalize people or manhandle ‘stuff’). Yet – how did the historical actor perceive and render this simultaneity?

Moreover; Maik encountered WWII at the ‘home front’ of Essen, a city that was most heavily bombed, and the air-raid sirens blow almost every night for almost five years from summer 1940 to early 1945. And after 1942 Maik was among those Germans who routinely were put in charge of forced laborers on the industrial shopfloor. Yet, the attraction or scorn he felt or acted out when encountering or ‘doing’ violence – in the bomb shelter at night, on the industrial shopfloor by day? – is a *total blank* in his notations. After all, this is the most troubling void of his effort to take note of the synchronicity of different situations and practices for years and years.

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